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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LUSAKA 000911

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SUBJECT: BANDA HEARS COOPERATING PARTNERS' CONCERNS -- BUT  
WILL HE LISTEN?

REF: A. LUSAKA 730  
[1](#)B. LUSAKA 868  
[1](#)C. LUSAKA 367

Classified By: Ambassador Donald E. Booth for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: At a November 24 meeting, the Ambassador and Dutch and World Bank cooperating partner troika colleagues told President Banda that donor countries want to work with the Zambian government (GRZ) to help its people, but stressed that Zambia's cooperating partner would continue to express concerns about GRZ actions (or inaction) that could affect their support to Zambia. The Troika also told Banda that the 2011 national elections must be seen as credible. As such, voter registration must begin soon to avoid mass disenfranchisement, especially among youth, and government leaders must continue to speak out against election-related violence. To improve public sector financial management, the GRZ needs to follow through on auditing ministries. The Troika urged the GRZ to speed civil service pay reform and government downsizing to promote a more efficient, professional, and affordable government workforce, and to adopt and implement a freedom of information law. Banda was relaxed and engaged throughout the one-hour meeting and agreed with many of the points the Troika raised. He blamed the lack of progress in many areas on inertia -- he said it is difficult to get his ministers to embrace "new ideas." Interestingly, Banda mentioned that the donor community would "be sorry" if one of his political rivals wins the presidency in 2011 and will realize what a democrat he was after he is gone. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Donor Troika chiefs of mission from the Netherlands (chair), World Bank, and United States met with President Banda on November 24. The Troika told Banda that it is critical that Zambia's 2011 elections be seen as credible -- a true expression of the Zambian people's will. They expressed concern that voter registration had not yet begun and that delays could disenfranchise millions of unregistered Zambian voters. They noted that cooperating partners had committed over USD 14 million to assist the Electoral Commission of Zambia with voter registration and the Ministry of Home Affairs with National Registration Card (NRC) issuance. (NOTE: The USG committed USD 2 million to help Home Affairs improve the NRC issuance process. To vote, a Zambian needs both a national ID and a voter registration card and both must reflect the same domicile. END NOTE.) The Troika commended Banda for speaking out against election-related violence, but stressed that all party and government leaders must continue to do so, especially in light of recent by-election violence (refs A and B). Banda agreed on the need to prevent violence and pledged to ensure that the GRZ carries out impartial voter registration prior to elections.

[1](#)3. (C) The Troika pressed Banda to follow through on his call for audits of all spending ministries to avoid embezzlement issues such as the Ministry of Health scandal (ref C). Banda affirmed that he will push audits forward and

said the GRZ will eliminate wasteful spending on major projects by bringing in experts to supervise implementation. Turning to civil service pay reform, Banda noted that the GRZ salary revision exercise had been completed and approved by the Cabinet. The GRZ has not made similar progress in identifying government jobs for elimination. The Troika cautioned that if government right-sizing does not move forward in tandem with pay adjustments the GRZ will have an even more unsustainable wage bill. Banda explained that it will be difficult to reach agreement on job cuts. The Troika also urged him to pursue decentralization. Banda said he was committed to decentralization in principle but noted that previous attempts failed because provinces and districts lack the capacity to manage funds and run programs. He would welcome donors assistance with local capacity building.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador and his colleagues noted the GRZ had made little progress in passing a Freedom of Information (FOI) law, and offered to assist the GRZ in doing so. Banda welcomed donor help crafting the legislation. (NOTE: Mike Mulungoti, Minister of Works and Supply, confirmed at a November 25 budget support pledging meeting that an FOI bill, modeled on a U.K. FOIA, has been drafted. He said the challenge now is to convince cabinet and parliament that it is a "harmless" law that government officials need not fear. END NOTE.)

¶5. (C) Banda took the opportunity to defend himself against recent allegations of impropriety and his government's perceived backsliding on democratic ideals. Banda said that "after I am gone..." the donor community would "realize what a democrat I was." He intimated that his political rivals

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lacked his democratic credentials, and cautioned that the donor community "would be sorry" if they got into power. Referring to allegations that he meddled with official medical evacuations, Banda stated that a committee of doctors at the University Teaching Hospital (UTH) in Lusaka -- not him -- decides who gets medevaced to South Africa. Banda asserted that he attended the funeral of the son of a former military chief under investigation for corruption because the deceased was his nephew -- not to show support for the military chief. Banda also affirmed that former president Frederick Chiluba went to Nigeria at GRZ expense because the Constitution grants such a privilege to former heads of state, not at his behest.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: President Banda seemed very relaxed and engaged throughout the one-hour meeting. He often referred to the difficulty he has had winning Cabinet support for what he considers necessary reforms, and shared how Minister of Home Affairs Lameck Mangani and police chiefs had defended restrictive tactics based on outdated national security arguments. Banda's inability to rally his Cabinet behind him is telling, as he has never had the full support of the MMD leadership following former president Mwanawasa's death and his by-election win. Two recent parliamentary by-election losses have resulted in some MMD soul-searching and finger-pointing. Banda may have been musing about his own political future, or he could have been trying to deflect criticism away from himself by pointing out what he considers the sins of his potential MMD as well as real opposition party political rivals. END COMMENT.  
BOOTH